

¡Viva Colombia/Colombia Viva!

A fantasy trip for the five senses

Lori Langer de Ramirez

In my experience, Colombia is among the most misunderstood Spanish-speaking countries. Most of the news we receive about Colombia involves drug trafficking or guerilla warfare, due to the many social and political problems that face the country. It is rare that we learn about the culture and people of this beautiful South American country. It was my goal to expose my students to a different view of Colombia – one that I experienced on my own travels to the country.

Introduction and Rationale

To prepare for the New York State Second Language Proficiency Exam, my eighth grade Spanish students wrote short stories, created dialogs, read newspaper and magazine advertisements and other bits of realia and immersed themselves in everything Spanish. They were ready for a challenge, so I decided to take them on a trip, a week-long fantasy trip to Colombia, in order to really practice the language they had been studying for two years.

Another aim was to provide students with communicative activities that involved their five senses: sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch. In order to access all five senses, I chose a virtual visit to the Colombian coast. Rich in culture and history, *la costa colombiana* provides ample opportunities for designing lessons involving food, music and crafts.

Preparation

We began our trip with a passport. Students were presented with an application form for their own travel document. They were asked to include their *nombre* (name), *apellido* (last name), *nacionalidad* (nationality), *fecha de nacimiento* (birth date), and *lugar de nacimiento* (birthplace). With this information, I created personalized passports for each student. We chose “*Reinalandia*” as the name for our classroom country based on my nickname, “*la reina*” (the queen) (see Figure 1 for passport template).

The preparations also included the issuance of an “airline ticket” that I had prepared to look like a real ticket with the student’s name. This extra step took some time, but added an authenticity to the activity that students appreciated. The tickets and passports were issued to the students the day before our departure.

Figure 1

Passport Template

Número de pasaporte:	<input type="text"/>
Apellido	<input type="text"/>
Nombre	<input type="text"/>
Nacionalidad	<input type="text"/>
Fecha de nacimiento:	<input type="text"/>
Lugar de nacimiento:	<input type="text"/>
Autoridad, fecha y lugar (para tu profesor/a)	
<input type="text"/>	

Day One: Departure and the flight

When students arrived at our classroom door on the day of departure, I met them seated at a desk outside of the room. I wore a homemade badge, made to represent those used by airline personnel, with my name and the word “*agente*” (agent) and asked students “*Su pasaporte y boleto, por favor.*” (Your passport and ticket, please.) Students giggled as they handed over their documents and smiled broadly as I

stamped their passports with an “*Ole*” stamp (any commercial stamp will do).

Inside the classroom, students saw their desks arranged to resemble a large airplane with two seats together on either side of an “aisle.” They were instructed to look for their seat assignment. Once all students were seated, I changed my *agente* badge for an apron and small hat and started making safety announcements in Spanish as the flight attendant. I demonstrated the seatbelt using a large leather belt and asked students to pantomime putting on their belts. I distributed a brief information sheet to the students (see Appendix A) and informed them that they would be seeing an in-flight movie on the history, geography and culture of Colombia (see resources for more information).

As students watched the video, they filled in the *yo sé* (I know) portion of the KWL chart in Spanish (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

KWL Chart in Spanish

S (yo sé)	Q (quiero saber)	A (aprendí)

During the video, I also walked up and down the aisles in order to distribute *toallas calientes* (warm towels), *manti* (peanuts), and *jugo* (juice). At the end of our flight, we pantomimed a slightly bumpy landing and students de-boarded. They were asked to fill in the *quiero saber* (I would like to know) column of their KWL chart for homework.

Day Two: The Taste of Cartagena

The following day, students were again faced with a desk in the hallway upon their arrival to class. This time, they were officially entering Colombia and had their passports stamped again (with a different stamp and ink color). I wore an *aduana* (customs) badge and greeted them with a friendly *Bienvenido a Colombia!* (Welcome to Colombia!) When they entered class, they were told that they were walking in town and would be trying some *jugos tropicales* (tropical fruit juices).

I had a blender set up in the classroom and had already prepared one of the three drinks. The blender was placed on a desk that had been made up to look like a typical *puesto de frutas* (fruit stand) (see the NNELL website for a sample drinks list). I chose the drinks based on several factors: taste, color and novelty. The three fruit juices I prepared were: *lulo* (lulo), *maracuyá* (passion fruit), and *mora* (Andean blackberry) (I used frozen pulp of the three fruits - see resources for more information). I wanted students to try unfamiliar fruits that were still appealing. Finally, the colors of the three juices are vibrant and interesting. *Lulo* juice is a delightful chartreuse color, while *maracuyá* is bright yellowish orange and *mora* is a deep purple color. The students were almost as excited about the colors of the drinks as they were the taste.

After all three drinks were served, students were asked to vote on their favorite. I distributed large Post-it® notes to the students and asked them to write their names on one. Then we graphed the three fruits on the board and students placed their Post-it® note next to their favorite drink. The resulting bar graph revealed that *jugo de maracuyá* (passion fruit juice) was the class favorite by far. With this information, we also practiced structures like *más rico que* (more delicious than) and *menos rico que* (less delicious than) as well as: “*El jugo favorito de la clase es maracuyá*” (The class’ favorite juice is passion fruit).

Day Three: The Sounds of Barranquilla

On the third day of our adventure, students were taken to the *playas* (beaches) of Barranquilla. They had their passports stamped again, and were ushered into the room to the sounds of *vallenatos* – a traditional type of music from the Colombian coast (see resources for more information). On the floor were several colorful blankets and towels. Once students were all seated on the “beach,” I told them a little about the history of *vallenato* and how it reveals influences from three ethnic groups of the region: the indigenous peoples, African descendants and the European settlers. I displayed photos of the three instruments used in this type of music. (See Figure 3).

Students were then given a song sheet with the lyrics to *Carito*, a Carlos Vives song, and then asked to listen to it. As they listened to the song, I distributed coconut ices – a typical treat from *la costa* - to each student (see resources for more information). Students enjoyed the treat and the music. For homework, they filled in a question grid with the basic who, what, where, when and why information from the song.

Figure 3

Musical Instruments

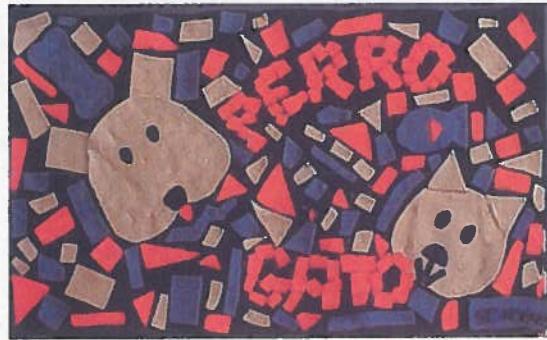
Instrumento	Influencia
la guacharaca	indígena
la caja	africana
el acordeón	europea

Day Four: The Sights and Feel of Santa Marta

Our last destination was Santa Marta. On this day I set up a craft on the teacher's desk. On display, were examples of *molas* from my own collection. *Molas*, I explained to students, originated in Panamá and were made by the Kuna women as adornments for their clothing. Legend has it that originally Kuna women tattooed themselves with geometric patterns as a means of decorating their upper bodies, which they traditionally did not cover. When European and North American influence became more common in the region, the women were made to cover themselves and thus started decorating their clothing with the patterns. When tourism increased

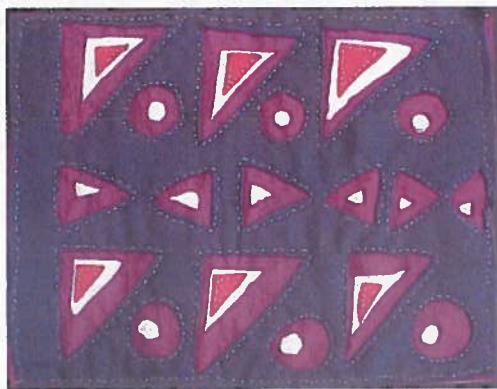
in the region, *molas* became a commodity and now entire pueblos of Kunas make their living creating this intricate art form.

Molas are made from layers of multi-colored fabric. A pattern, either geometric or pictorial, is cut into the layers, revealing different colors. The openings are sealed with fine stitching. The result is a stunning display of artistry (see re-



Student mola

sources for more information). After viewing the *molas* on display, students were given felt pieces and encouraged to create their own *molas*. The resulting works of art included images such as family pets, musical notes, students' names and even a loving rendition of Muzzy, their favorite Spanish video character! For homework, students were asked to write a "guess who?" type description of their *mola*, focusing on its look and feel.



Student mola

Day Five: Going Home

The culminating activity of our fantasy trip involved a real trip to the computer lab. On the last day, I had students to write a series of PowerPoint "postcards" describing their favorite part of each day's activities. They were encouraged to use images researched on the Internet and were allowed to refer to any notes or handouts that they received during the trip. The resulting collection of postcards was displayed in a showcase outside of the school library, along with photos of the students from the trip and examples of their *molas*. Students enjoyed seeing the interest that the display created in the school community.

Conclusion

This fantasy trip activity was exciting both for students and for me. They enjoyed the details: the tickets, the coconut ice on the beach of Baranquilla and the in-flight movie. I enjoyed sharing a part of the world with students who may never have the chance or inclination to visit Colombia for themselves. Since the entire unit was conducted exclusively in Spanish, it provided students with a context for natural language, communicative tasks and creative experiences to prepare for their upcoming, high-stakes exam. After the activity, students approached me about taking more "trips" in class. Given the success of this journey, I can't wait to take off again in search of more tastes, scents and sights. The rest of the world is waiting!

Resources

Video: *Colombia de Hoy*, item #V1144, purchased from Teacher's Discovery <http://www.teachersdiscovery.com/>

Fruit Pulp: Tropical fruit pulp can be purchased at most stores where Latin foods or Goya products are sold. They are usually located in the frozen food aisle and include a myriad of fruits, among them: *piña*, *coco*, *mango*, *curuba*, *tamarindo*. (pineapple, coconut, mango, curuba, tamarind) If your local supermarket does not carry these pulps, you can order online at <http://cubanfoodmarket.com> click on "groceries/produce" and select "frozen foods" from the pulldown menu.

Music: Carlos Vives has made *vallenato* music popular. Most of his recordings have some *vallenato* songs included. His *Clásicos de la Provincia* CD is the best choice for a complete selection of *vallenatos*. Visit his website for a discography and even a video of Carlos greeting his fans! <http://www.carlosvives.com/>

Ices: Extremely easy and inexpensive to make, simply mix coconut pulp (see reference for fruit pulp above) with some water or milk and pour mixture into an ice cube tray. Cover the tray with wax paper or plastic wrap and stick a toothpick or Popsicle stick in each section. Once the ices are frozen, remove the wax or plastic and pop out each treat!

Molas: These wonderful art objects are easily attained via auction sites like eBay, Kuna cooperatives, and through art education catalogs like Crizmac. Size, theme and quality varies, making it easy to purchase one that best suits your budget and needs. See Crizmac: <http://www.crizmac.com/> and Kuna Cooperative: http://www.pan-art.com/mola_gallery.htm

Appendix A

Nuestro viaje a Colombia

Mapas



Clima

Colombia mantiene muy húmedo y caliente en la costa caribe y pacífica. El clima cambia rápidamente (de caliente a frío) cuando uno viaja de la costa al altiplano andino.

Ciudades	Pronóstico mañana	Pronóstico tarde	Máxima	Mínima
Bogotá	Lloviznas	Lloviznas	18°C	10°C
Cartagena	Nublado	Nublado	32°C	24°C
Medellín	Nublado	Lluvias	28°C	19°C

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Lori Langer de Ramirez, Ed.D. is a teacher of Spanish and the Chairperson of the ESL and World Language Department for Herricks Public Schools. The author of several Spanish-language books and texts, such as *Cuéntame – Folklore y fábulas* (a folktale-based reader with activities) and *Mi abuela ya no está* (a picturebook about the Day of the Dead), her most recent work has involved the development of an interactive website that offers teachers over 40 virtual picture books, pages of realia, links and other curricular materials for teaching Spanish, French and ESL (please visit at www.miscositas.com). Lori is the immediate Past President of NNELL.